Identifying good practice: a survey of college provision in construction, planning and the built environment

This report presents factors which enable post-16 learners to make good progress in the sector subject area of construction, planning and the built environment. Between November 2006 and March 2007, inspectors visited 22 colleges where provision had been judged to be good or outstanding at their last inspection. Examples of good practice are given and recommendations for improvement are made.

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Contents

Executive summary

Between November 2006 and March 2007, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and inspectors from the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) visited 22 colleges where Ofsted had previously identified good or better provision in construction. Many, but not all, of the colleges visited had maintained or improved upon the high standards observed at their previous inspection.

Overall success rates for construction courses have improved significantly. Many of the colleges visited had success rates well above the national average. This improving trend is reflected nationally in the first statistical release from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), which shows construction, planning and the built environment as one of the most improved sector subject areas in 2005/06, with an increase in overall long course success rates of 9% compared with the previous year.[1] However, construction, planning and the built environment remains one of the lowest performing sector subject areas in terms of overall learner success rates.

Much of the practical teaching seen was good. Teachers were particularly adept at relating theory lessons to practical activities and, in the most effective lessons, teachers drew skilfully on learners' own experiences from the workplace. Learners produced work of a high standard in both trade and technician areas. In some colleges teachers used information learning technology effectively to make theory teaching more interesting and interactive, although more often it was not being used to its full potential to enhance learning. Theory teaching remained less effective than practical teaching and was not as enjoyable for learners.

An extensive range of courses with good opportunities for progression was available in many colleges. Courses ranged from entry level to level 3 in most colleges, with some higher level courses provided in a few cases. Courses were well suited to learners and met their needs and the needs of employers and the community. Full- and part-time day and evening courses were provided in many colleges, with some offering multiple start dates throughout the year. The majority of colleges offered work-based learning programmes.

Many colleges had outstanding links with schools and provided valuable learning opportunities that enabled pupils aged 14–16 to experience construction education and training. Progression onto post-16 courses for these pupils was good in many colleges. Work experience placements were provided for full-time post-16 learners in some colleges, but this was not the case in all colleges. Progression from courses at level 1 to level 2 was good, but fewer learners progressed from level 2 to level 3 or from craft to professional courses. Very few learners progressed from level 3 to higher level courses.

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[1] The statistical first release page is: www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/Data/statistics/sfr/

Most colleges visited provided good guidance and support for learners. Initial assessment arrangements were comprehensive and, in the best practice, course-specific aptitude tests were completed prior to learners being offered a course place. Learning support was effective and helped learners make progress in both theory and practical lessons. Learners' progress was monitored well. Staff provided valuable one to one support for learners and assisted them with course-specific advice and guidance during tutorial time. However, in many colleges, the broader aspects of a tutorial entitlement were not covered sufficiently.

Leadership and management were very good and teamwork was excellent in many of the colleges visited. Most colleges had experienced some difficulties in recruiting well qualified and experienced teachers and in some cases a significant number of staff were relatively new to teaching. Managers supported staff well and subject-specific mentors or advanced practitioners played a significant role in developing and supporting staff new to teaching. Many colleges had outstanding resources. Links with employers and with industry manufacturers and suppliers were strong. The management of work-based learning and its integration within the curriculum had improved, with more apprentices completing frameworks.

Many of the colleges visited did not do enough to assess learners' progress in relation to their starting points; few colleges collected or analysed data to show whether learners entered industry-related employment at a level commensurate with their knowledge and skills. Self-assessment was broadly accurate in the majority of colleges visited, although most did not use learner destination data to help judge the effectiveness of their provision.

Key findings

In the construction provision surveyed, the following factors contributed to improvements in the quality of provision and improved outcomes for learners:

- Most practical teaching sessions in construction were at least good. Teachers were very supportive and good at passing on their skills and knowledge. Learners produced work of a high standard in plumbing, electrical and gas installation, brickwork, carpentry and joinery.
- Many teachers made extensive use of the high quality resource materials to promote interactive learning in construction that were produced by the former Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) Standards Unit. Some teachers had adapted their own teaching materials along similar lines to make lessons more interesting and enjoyable for learners.
- Theory teaching was closely linked to practical activity and many teachers drew effectively on learners' experience from the workplace to enhance learning.
- Subject-specific mentors and advanced practitioners played a significant role in developing and supporting construction staff new to teaching.

- Colleges offered an extensive range of courses in construction at levels 1 and 2, and the rate of progression from level 1 to level 2 was good.
- Colleges had strong and productive links with schools that enabled pupils aged 14–16 to experience a wide range of construction courses. The progression rate to post-16 courses was good.
- Work experience placements benefited learners and enabled them to apply their knowledge and skills in real-life situations in the construction industry.
- Initial assessment was enhanced by course-specific aptitude testing, which ensured that learners were enrolled on a construction course which matched their needs and interests.
- The monitoring of learners' progress and the provision of one to one support to aid progress was highly effective.
- Most colleges worked closely with construction employers, industry manufacturers and suppliers. Many colleges benefited from extensive sponsorship from suppliers and manufacturers.
- Entry into skills competitions with prizes sponsored by employers and manufacturers helped to motivate and encourage construction learners and raised standards.
- Self-assessment was well established and broadly accurate. Construction staff contributed well to the self-assessment process and analysed evidence effectively to identify the key strengths and areas for improvements in provision.

The survey identified aspects of provision that needed further development in the majority of colleges visited, even though the overall quality of much of the provision visited was good or better.

- Some theory teaching in construction was dull and uninspiring and failed to motivate learners. Information learning technology was not used to its full potential to make theory teaching more memorable and enjoyable for learners.
- Progression rates between construction courses at levels 2 and 3, from level 3 to higher level courses, and between craft and professional courses were low.
- Not all full-time construction learners benefited from work experience placements.
- Construction teachers were less effective at covering the broader aspects of a tutorial entitlement.
- Few colleges collected learner destination data to ensure that construction learners entered industry employment at a level commensurate with their knowledge and skills. Destination data were rarely used to help judge the effectiveness of provision.

Recommendations

The survey identified many aspects of good practice in the construction departments visited. To improve further the quality of provision, the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills and the Department for Children, Schools and Families, together with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Quality and Improvement Agency, should:

- continue to support the development of high quality interactive teaching and learning materials in construction and the professional development of teaching staff.

Colleges should:

- make more effective use of information learning technology and other aspects of teaching and learning to make theory lessons in construction more interesting, interactive and memorable for learners
- provide work experience placements for all full-time learners to enable them to experience real-life working conditions in the construction industry
- promote construction learners' personal development and well-being by providing the broader aspects of a tutorial entitlement more effectively and by improving progression rates to higher level courses
- collect learner destination data more systematically to ensure that learners enter employment at a level which does justice to their qualifications and skills and use the information when assessing the effectiveness of provision in construction.

Factors contributing to good quality provision

Achievement and standards

1. Many of the colleges visited had overall success rates well above national average levels and data showed continual year-on-year improvement. In the best departments overall success rates exceeded the national rate by more than 20%. In these departments retention rates were high and the majority of learners completed their course successfully and achieved their qualification aim. This improving picture is reflected nationally as demonstrated by the first statistical release from the LSC, which shows construction, planning and the built environment as one of the most improved sector subject areas in 2005/06. Overall, long course success rates improved from 53% in 2004/05 to 62% in 2005/06. However, nationally, despite this rate of improvement, construction, planning and the built environment remains one of the lowest performing sector subject areas in terms of overall learner success rates.

2. Learners on apprenticeship programmes in the majority of colleges visited achieved well. In the most successful departments, completion rates for both

apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes were well above national average rates. In almost all colleges visited, completion rates on work-based learning programmes had improved year on year, with the most significant improvement seen in key skill achievement rates. Nationally, the proportion of learners completing work-based learning apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes has also improved. In 2005/06 the overall success rate for full framework completions on advanced apprenticeship programmes was 51%, which is an increase of 25% since 2003/04. Similarly, the overall success rate for apprenticeship programmes improved from 25% in 2003/04 to 55% in 2005/06. These overall success rates, whilst still too low, are above the national average success rates for all sector subject areas, with advanced rates significantly above average.

3. Achievements in key skills had improved in most of the colleges visited, with more learners passing key skills tests and completing portfolios. There was better recognition by staff and by learners of the importance of key skills in aiding learner progress and in improving future employability or progression choices. However, opportunities that occur naturally for gaining the wider key skills of improving own learning and performance and problem solving were not always maximised and very few departments enabled learners to gain these qualifications.

4. Some of the departments visited offered a good range of industry-relevant additional qualifications. Short courses enabled learners to gain useful and often mandatory competence certificates which were valued by employers. These qualifications improved the employability prospects of learners and prepared them well for the world of work.

Enhancing learners' achievement

Learners at one college benefited significantly from the opportunity to achieve one or more industry-related additional qualifications. In addition to their main course of study and to the other required qualifications, such as key skills that made up their programme, learners were able to select from a list of industry-related additional qualifications. These included options that were specifically related to each vocational trade area such as an abrasive wheels course, an electrical testing course or a safe use of ladders course, as well as more generic qualifications such as first aid, health and safety and manual lifting qualifications. Learners and employers valued these qualifications and many learners successfully gained full-time industry-related employment on completion of their course.

5. The standard of learners' practical work was very good in many of the departments visited. Inspectors observed learners completing work to high standards in both trade and technician areas. In the best examples learners worked with a high regard for health and safety and used tools and equipment

competently. Plumbing, electrical and gas installations were fitted well with pipework, cable and appliances installed neatly and in accordance with relevant regulations. Brickwork, roofing and tiling and plastering tasks were carefully completed with a high regard to the quality of finish produced. In carpentry and joinery, students were able to interpret drawings and make accurate models of complex roofing structures. Learners on national diploma courses produced very detailed technical drawings of complex buildings and were able to use specialist surveying and levelling equipment to set out building lines.

6. Skills competitions were a positive feature of the most successful departments. Entry into local, regional and national competitions motivated learners and enabled them to develop high level practical skills. Many colleges participating in skills competitions focused their practical training around complex and demanding competition activities which motivated learners to work at a level that often exceeded the requirements of their course.

Teaching and learning

7. Teaching was good overall in many of the colleges visited. Inspectors observed 76 lessons in total, which included theory, practical, tutorial and key skills sessions. Many lessons were judged to be good or better, with more practical sessions being graded good or outstanding than theory lessons. However, only 11% of lessons observed were judged to be outstanding and 4% were graded inadequate, which demonstrated the need for further improvement.

8. Practical teaching was well planned and enabled learners to progress at their own pace. Teachers gave excellent demonstrations and provided good one to one support for learners. Workshops were well managed and technicians provided excellent support for teachers. Practical training tasks were well designed and provided interesting, challenging and realistic tasks for learners to complete.

9. Theory teaching was most effective when it was linked to some form of practical activity and when learners were actively involved. In these lessons learners put into practice the knowledge they had gained and were able to develop a greater level of understanding. Practical activities reinforced theoretical concepts and made learning more interesting and memorable.

Effective lesson planning

In a level 3 plumbing class, teaching and learning were outstanding and learners made excellent progress. They developed a thorough understanding of theoretical concepts and were able to demonstrate a high level of practical competence. Learners could explain the operating principles of gas safety controls, identify the control on an appliance, and test its correct operation. Highly effective lesson planning linked classroom-based theory work to related practical activity. Clear lesson

objectives were set which were shared with learners. Well prepared learning resources were available in a variety of formats to meet the needs of group members. Learners were encouraged to discuss and debate, to work in pairs and in small groups to solve specific tasks, to identify faults or to complete set activities. Teacher input was well balanced with meaningful learner activity.

This approach to teaching and learning has seen pass rates in written tests improve significantly and has led to an increase in overall success rates. Learners commented very positively about the effectiveness of teaching.

10. The most effective theory classes deployed a range of approaches to teaching and learning. In some departments visited, teachers made extensive use of the high quality resources produced by the former DfES' Standards Unit to deliver aspects of health and safety training. These resources promoted variety and engaged learners in many different activities including team work, role play, card activities and interactive quizzes using computer based software. Many learners commented favourably about the approaches used and the quality of the materials. In some colleges teachers had adapted their own teaching materials to make lessons more interesting for learners by using approaches similar to those in the Standards Unit resources.

Interactive teaching

A teacher at one college had produced some outstanding teaching and learning materials that made a theory lesson for a group of carpentry and joinery learners more interesting and interactive. Activities included watching and responding to short video clips about site safety related to carpentry tasks, an interactive quiz testing learners' knowledge of specialist tools and equipment, group work activities designed to meet various key skills criteria whilst revisiting previous learning related to the roles and responsibilities of the building team, and role play activities to further reinforce learning.

The use of mentors

11. In some colleges, especially where many staff were new, or relatively new, to teaching, mentors and advanced practitioners played a significant role in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Mentors provided good support and in the best practice were given an allocation of time to enable them to develop resources, provide staff development activities and coach staff to improve.

Mentor support

An advanced practitioner at one college provided outstanding support to colleagues within the department. Many teachers were newly appointed and had been recruited directly from industry with little or no teaching experience. A significant amount of time was allocated to enable the advanced practitioner to develop resources, provide staff development and coach individual members of staff. The advanced practitioner attended construction network meetings and had gained a coaching qualification as part of the national teaching and learning change programme. The resources and knowledge gained by the advanced practitioner were effectively disseminated within the department by formal staff development sessions to share resources and good practice. Staff new to teaching especially benefited as the advanced practitioner was able to spend time explaining systems and processes; many of these were new and complex and not fully understood at the outset. The advanced practitioner also supported lesson planning and teaching sessions which new staff found especially useful. College observation records showed a significant improvement in the quality of teaching within the department and staff commented very favourably about the quality of development activity, the effectiveness of new resources for teaching and learning, and how the advanced practitioner had helped them improve their practice.

12. All of the colleges visited placed a strong emphasis on improving teaching and learning. Generally, robust procedures for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching were in place. College observation records showed an improving trend in the quality of teaching and learning. In the best practice staff development activities were closely linked to development needs identified during observations and the process was used as a tool to target development activities to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Range of courses and links with schools

13. Most colleges visited offered a broad range of courses from entry level to advanced level. The majority provided courses that reflected the needs and interests of learners, employers and the communities they served. Progression opportunities to enable learners to move from one level to the next were good. However, progression rates vary significantly at different levels. Many learners successfully progress on to level 2 programmes after completing level 1, but much smaller numbers progress from level 2 to level 3 courses and fewer still continue to higher level courses. Progression rates from craft courses to technical and professional courses were low in most colleges.

14. Many colleges had strong and productive links with local schools. In the majority of cases pupils from local schools attended appropriate courses that enabled them to gain a valuable insight into construction education and training. In the best practice, where the school had a vocational education offer

open to all pupils, joint delivery of construction qualifications occurred between the school and the college. Many pupils who completed construction qualifications while at school progressed to a post-16 course at a college.

Collaboration between a school and a college

Successful partnership arrangements had been created between a local school and a college where construction courses were jointly delivered. Staff from the school had participated in development activity provided by the college to become familiar with the structure and requirements of construction qualifications. Staff from the school and the college planned courses well and produced very detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. Assessment schedules were well designed and common documentation was developed. Students were taught at the school and the college by school and college staff. Courses were available at a variety of levels enabling access to pupils of all ability levels. Courses ranged from taster type courses designed to enable pupils to experience a variety of different construction courses to a GCSE course. The courses provided a good balance of practical and theory and afforded a valuable insight into the construction industry. Success rates on many courses were high and a significant number of learners completing progressed on to full-time construction courses or on to apprenticeship programmes once they left school.

15. In a minority of cases poor practice was seen where some school pupils attended college courses that did not lead to a qualification outcome. In these instances course planning was generally poor and outcomes undefined. Learners did not gain a useful insight into construction occupations and in some instances they were simply occupied with practical tasks that had little meaning or relevance to them.

Work experience

16. Learners commented extremely positively about the value of work experience. The skills developed, the evidence gathered and the experience gained by learners when completing work placements significantly enhanced their programmes. In the best practice all learners on construction courses completed a work placement where they were able to experience real-life working conditions and to put into practice the skills they had gained whilst at college. In some instances learners gained full-time employment with the company that provided the work placement.

Providing work experience

Work experience placements were provided for full-time learners at one college by an innovative exchange programme. When part-time work-based learners attended college for their off the job training, full-time

learners were provided with work experience opportunities with the work-based learners' employers. This exchange programme worked well and provided valuable opportunities for full-time learners to experience life on a building site or real life working conditions in domestic, commercial or industrial premises. It also enabled learners to put into practice the skills they had developed. The programme was also beneficial to employers as they benefited from the additional help provided and were able to identify potential future employees.

Another college was particularly successful in arranging work experience placements for learners. Outstanding links had been developed with local employers and industry ranging from the self-employed plumber to large general building companies to national supplier chains. Many local employers provided work experience opportunities every year and, in many cases, following work experience learners were offered full-time employment.

Learners initially attended college for a six week period during which time they would complete a basic construction qualification and gain some useful practical skills. College staff worked closely with employers and learners during this period to identify appropriate placement opportunities. Following placements learners continued their study on a part-time basis while working within the industry or moved to work-based learning programmes. The majority of learners entered industry employment at the end of their course.

17. Not all colleges enabled learners to undertake work experience placements and in a few cases colleges recruited too many full-time learners. In these instances, insufficient consideration had been given to local labour market information, future skill requirements and the likely availability of work experience.

18. The use of site visits and visiting speakers, including industry manufacturers, suppliers and employers, enhanced the curriculum. Learners benefited from seeing the latest tools and equipment and were able to learn about different practical installation methods or techniques that they may not have experienced as part of their course. Site visits were particularly beneficial to full-time learners, helping to clarify their understanding of construction processes and giving them first hand experience of a number of activities that are not easily demonstrated in a college environment.

Site visits

Learners on a full-time national diploma course at one college benefited from a well planned series of site visits. Staff had formed productive links with a local house building contractor that enabled learners' access to several sites at various stages of development. Visits were arranged to

different sites to enable learners to see different construction operations being performed following related theory teaching sessions in the college. Visits enabled learners to see and fully appreciate the importance of activities such as site set-up and site management. They were able to observe soil testing, concrete pouring and the various stages of house construction from excavation to completion. Learners on the course demonstrated an excellent understanding of construction processes and were able to give detailed answers to questions. Assignment work was outstanding for many learners and a significant number of learners had achieved merit and distinction grades on previous assignments.

Support for learners

19. Support for learners was good in the departments visited. Staff had a good rapport with learners and working relationships were excellent in many colleges. Support from staff to ensure that learners were ready to complete practical assessment activities was very good. In the best practice staff gave learners access to practical training areas outside normal timetabled lessons and provided support to enable learners to practice tasks where they felt less confident or needed further help.

Supporting practical training

Staff at one college provided outstanding support for learners by allowing them flexible access to workshops outside of their normal timetabled lessons. Staff managed workshops well and space was well utilised. Learners could attend drop-in skills workshops in most trade areas that enabled learners, supported by teachers, to further develop their practical skills. These sessions were provided during the lunch break and typically teachers would demonstrate course specific tasks or activities and allow learners to practice these skills. In one such observed session a plumbing teacher skilfully demonstrated how to set out and boss a chimney weathering apron and supported several learners who had previously found this work difficult. Several learners had made use of these sessions to complete their course in a shorter time scale.

20. Work-based learners on national vocational qualification courses were well supported with portfolio building activities. Work-based assessors provided good support for learners by explaining evidence requirements and by identifying potential sources of evidence. An increasing number of colleges employed dedicated work-based assessors who observed learners undertaking real-life work activities. This good practice enabled valid evidence to be gathered effectively and stopped unnecessary duplication of tasks in college.

Supporting work-based learning

Assessors provided outstanding support for work-based learners at one college. Each curriculum area employed a dedicated work-based assessor to support learners with portfolio building activity, identifying and gathering evidence, completing progress reviews and action plans, and by conducting assessments in the workplace. Assessors were equipped with mobile phones to enable them to keep in touch with learners and to allow learners to make contact with their assessors. Progress reviews were completed well and actions required were clearly stated.

A significant amount of portfolio evidence was gathered from real-life working activity where assessors directly observed learners completing tasks in the workplace. Good use was made of photographic evidence produced using digital cameras to support assessor observation records. Portfolios were well presented and contained detailed and convincing evidence to prove learners' competence. Overall and timely success rates for learners had improved significantly since the introduction of work-based assessors and learners clearly valued the support they provided.

Initial assessment

21. Initial assessment arrangements are becoming increasingly more effective at ensuring that learners are placed on an appropriate course at the correct level. The majority of colleges had effective initial assessment arrangements in place to identify learners' basic and key skills support requirements. A few colleges had outstanding initial assessment arrangements where, in addition to basic and key skills initial assessment, all learners were interviewed by a vocational tutor and completed some form of vocational aptitude test comprising written and practical activities. Where this level of initial assessment had taken place, overall success rates were well above national average levels. In the best practice additional learning support was provided in practical and in theory classes.

Initial assessment

One college had devised outstanding arrangements for initial assessment. Entry requirements had been carefully considered for each individual course and were clearly explained in well produced course marketing literature. On receipt of a course application the college invited all learners for an introduction interview. This comprehensive process included an overview of the college, a review of the course content and specific requirements, and a tour of course-related facilities. Learners were then interviewed individually by a vocational teacher where prior attainment and aspirations were discussed. Following this, learners attempted a series of basic and key skills tests to determine their level of literacy and numerecy. They then completed a practical trade test and related written

aptitude test specific to their chosen trade. Results from the series of tests enabled staff to make well informed decisions about the type and the level of course to offer learners and to group learners according to their ability level. Retention and success rates have continued to improve year on year since the introduction of this process and are now well above national rates.

Tutorials

22. Support during tutorials largely focused on the monitoring of learner progress and staff were good at identifying what learners had completed and what they had left to do. However, tracking systems were largely paper-based and few colleges had computer-based tracking systems that effectively monitored all aspects of a learner's programme. In the best practice, where tracking systems were complete, all aspects of a learner's programme were well monitored and all staff that required access to the information could get it easily and quickly. This enabled staff completing tutorials to have a complete picture of the progress being made by the learner and to action plan accordingly.

Tracking and monitoring of learners' progress

The tracking and monitoring of learners' progress was outstanding at one of the colleges visited. A computer based system was used to record the individual components of a learner's programme, including any additional qualifications such as key skills. The information was accessible to tutors who taught any aspect of the learner's programme and to department and college managers. Progress information could be viewed by individual learner, group, course, qualification type, or at department level. Learners could also access their own progress information but could not add, remove or change any information. The system was updated frequently and was used well to monitor the overall performance of individuals during tutorials. Progress information was generated automatically when producing reports or reviews of learners' progress.

23. Teachers were less effective at covering the broader aspects of a tutorial entitlement. Although tutorial time was provided in the majority of colleges, often this time was used as additional course teaching time where learners would either complete additional theory or practical work. In many colleges tutorial time was not used to update individual learning plans, to provide careers advice and guidance or to cover issues such as equality and diversity, health or personal finance.

Leadership and management

24. In the majority of colleges visited effective leadership and management had led to improving standards. Many construction teams worked with a clear sense of purpose to make provision inclusive and to ensure that all learners were

successful. In the best practice good management structures within departments clearly identified specific roles and responsibilities that enabled all aspects of provision to be well monitored. Good evaluation and detailed improvement planning were features of the best departments.

Management structure, roles and responsibilities

Leadership and management were outstanding at one college. The head of department was well supported by the college senior management team and had created a highly effective management structure with carefully considered roles and responsibilities allocated to staff based on their interests and competence. Curriculum managers were given delegated responsibility and autonomy to run their own areas with devolved budgets for resources including staffing. This enabled staff with a more detailed understanding of a curriculum area to make strategic and operational decisions. Additionally, specific responsibilities for generic functions were allocated to named managers to ensure consistency across the department. These roles included: quality assurance, internal verification, on-site assessment, employer engagement, tracking and monitoring, resource development, observation of teaching and learning, and staff development. Communication across the department was excellent and benefited learners. Meetings had a clear purpose, were well documented and resulted in detailed action plans that sought to further improve the quality of provision.

25. Many of the colleges visited had outstanding links with employers and some were closely involved with their local communities. The effective links with employers, industry manufacturers and suppliers benefited the college and learners significantly by providing sponsorship of products, tools and equipment, or by the sponsoring of student prizes at college award ceremonies. Links with the community ranged from learners being involved with the completion of local projects to courses run specifically to meet local needs, for example courses being delivered in different community languages.

Industry and employer links to enhance learning

One college had been particularly successful in linking with employers, industry manufacturers and suppliers. By allocating time to a member of staff to link with external organisations, the college had secured a substantial amount of equipment that significantly enhanced the curriculum and the learning experience. Industry suppliers and manufacturers had formed partnerships with the college and many had donated tools, materials, appliances or equipment, including wood working machinery, boilers, and hand and power tools. Some companies had sponsored rooms or workshops and had fully equipped them to enable learners to complete training and assessment activities in exchange for the occasional use of the room to allow their own engineers to

undertake training courses. Many employers supported the college well and donated useful materials such as bricks, paint and timber left over from completed contracts that were used by learners when completing practical training activities. The college was very well supported by employers and industry organisations who donated prizes for the annual awards ceremony.

26. The standard of accommodation in many colleges had improved and some departments visited had outstanding resources. In most colleges workshops were well managed and space was well utilised. Tools and equipment were of a high standard and were well maintained. In the best practice technicians dedicated to curriculum areas provided excellent support to teaching staff and managed the practical resources and material stocks well.

27. Most departments had experienced some difficulty in recruiting, and in some cases retaining, qualified and experienced staff. In most departments at least one member of staff was new to teaching and in some cases several staff had not been in a teaching post for longer than two years. The majority of staff without a formal teaching qualification were working towards achieving one and many were also in the process of completing assessor awards. Good opportunities for staff development were available in most colleges and in the best practice construction staff teams participated in well devised professional development activity that improved performance and raised standards.

28. Quality assurance arrangements were good in many of the colleges visited. Data detailing learner achievements were easily accessible and used well in the majority of colleges. Learners and employers' views were gathered through questionnaires and focus group meetings in a number of colleges and the results of these were used effectively to aid self-assessment. However, few colleges collected learner destination data in sufficient detail to ensure that learners entered industry employment at a level commensurate with their knowledge and skills. Destination information was rarely considered in self-assessment when judging the effectiveness of provision.

29. The management of work-based learning, which was previously identified in a significant number of inspection reports as a weakness, has now improved. In most colleges visited communication between the work-based learning and college-based curriculum teams was effective and the planning and coordination of training and assessment activity had much improved. Many more learners were now completing their apprenticeship frameworks successfully.

Notes

The survey was conducted between November 2006 and March 2007 by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), two full-time inspectors from the Adult Learning

Inspectorate (ALI), and three additional inspectors. A sample of 22 colleges were selected, all of which had provision in construction, planning and the built environment that had been judged to be good or outstanding at a previous Ofsted inspection. The survey information was supplemented by evidence drawn from recent inspection reports where provision in construction, planning and the built environment had been inspected.

Useful websites

Further information on qualifications in construction, planning and the built environment can be found on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority website: www.qca.org.uk. This includes:

- GCE: www.qca.org.uk/qca_5152.aspx
- Diploma: www.qca.org.uk/qca_13481.aspx
- sector subject area/tier for construction, planning and the built environment: www.qca.org.uk/qca_8499.aspx#

The statistical first release from the Learning and Skills Council has information on outcomes in construction, planning and the built environment for learners in post-16 education and training in England: www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/Data/statistics/sfr/

Further information about the construction industry can be found on its sector skills councils' websites:

- www.constructionskills.net
- www.summitskills.org.uk

The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) provides useful e-learning resources and links to alternative sites to access further digital and interactive technology materials for use by teachers: www.becta.org.uk

The Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) website has useful advice, information and support on innovation and excellence in the post-16 learning and skills sector: www.qia.org.uk

The QIA excellence gateway is for post-16 learning and skills providers. It is the new home for Excalibur.[2] Here you will find examples of good practice and self-improvement; suppliers of improvement services; and materials to support teaching and learning:

- http://excellence.qia.org.uk

[2] Excalibur is now called the Good Practice Database.

- Excalibur Good Practice Database: http://excellence.qia.org.uk/goodpracticedatabase

Colleges participating in the survey

Accrington and Rossendale College
Bedford College
Blackpool and the Fylde College
Bracknell and Wokingham College
Burnley College
City of Bristol College
Darlington College
Herefordshire College of Technology
Highbury College
Hull College
Lambeth College
Leicester College
Moulton College
Newcastle College
Northumberland College
Peterborough Regional College
Redcar & Cleveland College
South Devon College
Stockport College
Stroud College
Wiltshire College
Wirral Metropolitan College